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State court reform plan outlined in MSC's annual report

“Performance, technology, and efficiency” are the elements of Michigan’s court reform plan, according to the Michigan Supreme Court’s 2012 annual report, released Wednesday.

Eliminating unneeded judgeships was just the beginning for Michigan court reform, Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr., said in a preface to the report.

Performance measurement is a key part of the reform plan and a way to improve public service, Young explained.

“While the quality of justice may elude measurement, many aspects of courts’ work — timeliness, access, cost-effectiveness, and much more — can be measured,” the chief justice said. Last year, the State Court Administrative Office launched Courts working smarter for a better Michigan, a statewide initiative in which Michigan trial courts will track — and report online — their progress on performance measures.

The annual report includes some performance measures that will be reported online later this month, including case clearance rates, child support collections, and recidivism rates for drug and alcohol court participants. Findings include that in 2012 state trial courts averaged 100 percent clearance rates, a measure of timeliness in resolving cases.

Other performance findings: Offenders who participate in therapy-based “problem solving courts” are less likely to commit more crimes, compared to offenders who receive traditional sanctions. And Michigan ranks seventh among the states in the amount of child support collected and distributed.

Court technology projects, particularly the “NextGen” case information system,

are also highlighted in the report. “NextGen” is aimed at providing a statewide information system, which Michigan currently lacks. Governor Snyder allotted \$2.5 million in FY 2014 funding for the “NextGen” project, but that funding was not included in budgets reported by Senate and House judiciary budget subcommittees. Young said he and other Court officials advocate for restoring that funding, part of \$10 million rolled out over four years for the project.

“With that funding, we’re looking at a five-year roll-out of ‘NextGen,’ which is still longer than we’d like,” Young said. “Without the funding, we’re looking at a much longer wait to get to a statewide system — which in turn holds up all the improved communication and access that a unified case information system has to offer.”

Court efficiency measures including streamlining trial courts through concurrent jurisdiction plans, which allow circuit, probate, and districts courts in the same judicial circuit to share workload and resources. The Supreme Court encourages streamlining, in part by appointing chief judges to each preside over more than one trial court. As of 2012, there were 36 “multicourt” chief judges in Michigan.

See the annual report on the “One Court of Justice” web site at www.courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/Resources/Documents/Publications/Statistics/2012/2012MSCAnnualReport.pdf. Statistical supplements, by region and county, are also online at www.courts.mi.gov/education/stats/Caseload/Pages/2012-Statistical-Supplement.aspx.